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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the school-based internship program developed at the Southern Cross University in New South Wales, Australia. Arrangements are described for interns' time spent in classrooms, collaborative teaching strategies which underpin intern placements, the security which supports interns' practice, and approaches to integrate their practice with university studies. Processes of appraisal of interns' development are explained, and the potential professional development of cooperating teachers brought about by mentoring interns is examined. The internship program, which is the central component of the Bachelor of Teaching (Primary) course, is characterized by: a partnership between the university and schools, whole-day experiences in schools each week for paired interns in supportive classrooms, and explicitly integrated study and practice. The internship arrangements were developed specifically to remove the abstruse in initial training and to effect more explicit and thereby improved teaching by graduates. (JDD)

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ED 377 147

School Experience: A Collaborative Partnership

William Young

This paper describes a number of special features of the school based internship program which has been developed at the Southern Cross University. Arrangements are described for interns' time spent in classrooms, collaborative teaching strategies which underpin these placements, the security which supports interns' practice, and approaches to integrate their practice with university studies. Processes of appraisal of interns' development are explained, and the potential of mentoring for their teachers' professional development is examined.

The Concept of Internship

The concept of internship adopted at Southern Cross University was developed directly from the research-informed program for secondary interns at Oxford University (Benton and Pendry, 1986). The Southern Cross internship refers to the central component of the Bachelor of Teaching (Primary) course, and is marked by three characteristics:

- a partnership between the university and schools of the north coast region in planning, implementing and evaluating the activities, content and procedures of the program;
- whole-day experiences in schools each week for paired interns in supportive classrooms; and
- explicitly integrated study and practice, so that interns' experiences in the classroom and the university are planned to complement and inform each other rather than to represent two different agendas.

Program Overview

Teacher education at Southern Cross Unviersity is taken in two stages. Preservice comprises three years of full time study and internship, leading to the award of Bachelor of Teaching. Post-experience entails two years of part time study for a Graduate Diploma of Education, and represents core requirements for the Master of Education when followed by a dissertation.

The preservice internship provides weekly placement for paired interns with a host class for approximately fifteen weeks, in both the first and third years of the course. Placements are concentrated in particular schools to raise the profile of preservice training there and to represent a significant responsibility for the teachers involved. A university lecturer (adviser) has responsibility for a group of schools and interns, accompanying them for each school experience, appraising their progress and conducting weekly seminars with the group to plan for and reflect on each experience.

This internship sets the context for university studies in Curriculum and Education, which address content and pedagogy tailored to meet interns' professional and vocational needs as they develop directly from their weekly classroom experiences. It embraces Zeichner's principle that "The central focus for initial teacher education must be topics and issues about teaching that arise from student teachers' practical work in classrooms.' (Zeichner, 1989).

Internship provides detailed situational knowledge of classrooms and pupils, and access to teachers' knowledge of the craft of teaching. These interact to represent rich learning environments for interns. Knowledge and competencies to be acquired are given explicit expression in the Internship Handbook, prepared in partnership by the university and schools under direction of a Practicum Committee.

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Special Features of Internship

Commonsense suggests that learning is enhanced by doing. Hands-on work with pupils in their classrooms illuminates the internship: its essence is contact with children over time, its impact is through applied learning. The features discussed below describe how this time is used and how learning is encouraged.

Quality time in Classrooms

The school-based internship exceeds many present alternatives in its provision of classroom contact over time. This time is deemed essential for preservice students to bond with a class of pupils, to come to know them thoroughly, and to effect quality programs tailored to their needs. Time in this context enables interns to analyse their school and classroom. Written planning must include variety of teaching strategies and must show assessment and reporting procedures consistent with them. Students are required to complete self-evaluation statements following each lesson, and to use these reflections explicitly to inform their subsequent teaching. Security to innovate with lesson delivery is achieved for interns through their pairing with a teacher and class, as well as with a university adviser and student peer. Advisers and teachers know their interns, and each has detailed knowledge of the pupils who are being taught. To this sound knowledge base of teacher by learner and learner by teacher, is attributed the real potential for learning offered by internship. This extensive contact over time is deemed essential for security, relevance and professional growth of students during initial training.

Analyses of their pupils' learning needs direct interns' focus on teaching strategies to promote investigating, problem solving, enquiry and cooperative learning within their classrooms. Subject content and teaching strategies are provided for each curriculum area in the Internship Handbook, and comprise the weekly in-university topics for study.

The bonding of intern, teacher and classroom provides the circumstances necessary for early vocational growth. As behaviour is strongly influenced by the setting in which it occurs, there are limits to the potential of conjectural knowledge (theory) of child behaviour to inform teaching strategies. Effective teaching is elusive in the absence of sustained first-hand experience with pupils in learning contexts. Through internship, teaching strategies are tempered by field testing, where real incidents occur and where resolution skills are developed.

Weekly internship experiences culminate in a practicum block on the same class. Knowledge of classroom dynamics and individual pupil needs enhance interns' practicum. More explicit and informed planning is made possible within a familiar classroom context. Practicum students have insisted for decades that just as they were beginning to operate effectively, the stand-alone teaching block finished. Just as they had begun to acquire knowledge for effective performance their practicum finished. The early casualties of classroom experience should not be self-esteem, motivation and achievement. Quality student teaching and learning about teaching is enhanced by involvement with pupil learning over time, as this takes place in secure classroom settings.

Collaborative Teaching

Early in their first year, students select an intern partner (peer). The pair shares the same teacher, classroom, university adviser and tutorial group. Peers are given training in classroom observation and feedback strategies, collaborative planning and debriefing skills. They observe and record (video) one another during lessons and debriefing sessions, and present their analyses to other intern pairs in tutorials. In turn, they observe, analyse and formally assess other pairs' presentations. Third Year peers jointly complete detailed profiles of their school and classroom, and prepare units of work and programs on the basis of this. They team-teach with one another and with their teachers, and provide regular debriefing of

one another's classroom work in the presence of their adviser and/or classroom teacher. All school related assignments may be jointly submitted. This mutual support is formally designed to instil values of collegiality and peer appraisal. It produces beginning teachers who engage regularly in professional dialogue about their pupils' learning. Summative assessments of performance are not made until practicum, affording a climate during internship for openness, frankness and encouragement which is highly valued both by interns and their supervising teachers. Anxiety over appraisal does not therefore impede initiative, risk taking and experimentation during internship. Its absence unambiguously sets the mentor's role as supportive rather than judgemental.

There is a wealth of knowledge about teaching and learning on any school staff. Access to this by student teachers is imperative. This will remain problematic where students' vocational development and summative assessment present conflicting demands on teachers (mentor and assessor). Award prescribed payments to supervising teachers require summative assessments, and mentoring becomes the casualty. At Southern Cross University mentoring supports the internship, while summative assessment is held of until the practicum block. This provides the climate throughout internship for teachers to share knowledge and insights about the craft of teaching. The openness which develops about performance, unencumbered by assessment anxieties, sets the agenda for collegial planning. Students become quite explicit about their individual needs, even short comings, while their peers and teachers are equally explicit about their progress.

Intern pairing during preservice training introduces students to the culture of sharing and collegiality which underpins effective team teaching, and should mark their subsequent professional practice as they enter teaching careers. It also has considerable impact on pupil learning. A classroom team comprising paired interns and their mentor provides three adults in a classroom, enhanced attention to the needs of individual pupils and consequently a richer environment for quality pupil learning across the year.

Security and Negotiation

In his review of research on teaching and consequent implications for teacher education, McIntyre concluded: 'Perhaps the most difficult implication to accept is the need to recognise that, whether we like it or not, interns will make their own judgements about what matters in teaching and about how best they can teach. The most fundamental way in which we can help interns is by giving them the kind of security they greatly need ... to make rational and realistic judgements.' (McIntyre, 1991, p. 122).

The internship at Southern Cross University underwrites students' security through their entitlement to negotiate. In first year, this includes choice of intern partner, grade level, placement school and thereby, university adviser. In each second year semester students prepare a detailed analysis of their previous practicum report, on the basis of which they negotiate an individualised contract to prepare for, implement and evaluate an action research topic of their choice in their subsequent practicum. Students present reports from these contracts to their tutorial groups after practicum, together with written summaries and references which are valued as resource material and a prime source of ideas for all students to enrich their final year internship. Students receive approximately twenty five special topic reports from their peers each semester. The negotiated contracts provide students with autonomy and authority over their own development, recognising that this is concerns-driven. By providing freedom about process, highly innovative and novel reports are the norm. Like all adult learners, the students perform best when empowered to set their own agendas for self-development.

Third Year students negotiate partners, schools, grade levels and advisers. They take great care with personal compatibility. Partners are sought who are supportive and reliable, who have complementary curriculum skills to their own and who are adept with peer appraisal and feedback techniques. Some are not chosen. At this level students may negotiate placement with a partner in the same school, but in another classroom, affording opportunity for

interaction with a class of their own and opportunity to operate across multiple grades; peer appraisal and collaboration responsibilities remain. This has become a popular option.

Primary and early childhood teachers increasingly engage in more open practice in their classrooms, where pupils negotiate much of their learning and colleagues enter into collaborative teaching arrangements with one another. Congruence between university and classroom teaching processes should be an important objective for teacher education courses, where the development of negotiating and collaborating skills should not be left to chance.

Many Australian schools fail to provide effective induction for new staff. It is important that graduating students have developed effective skills of negotiation during training to prepare them for the realities of beginning teaching. With these skills beginning teachers should be in a stronger position to negotiate classroom contexts which will enhance their first year's teaching. Such negotiations could address the debilitating anxieties and stress so common in this crucial first year.

Integration

For preservice students, theory without practice amounts to little more than prattle. Without clear notions of what they should be practising however, applied work in schools becomes merely, more of the same. It lacks direction or purpose. The internship program is designed to relate school-based work more closely to reflective thinking about it. It embraces the view that it is essential for the curriculum of teacher training to reflect contemporary experience in its coverage of curriculum, teaching strategies and real issues facing teachers and schools. (Schools Council, 1990, p. 88). The challenge is to achieve an appropriate mix of theory and contemporary practice. Relevance for students on this agenda is paramount and weekly internship experiences in classrooms with linked practicum blocks offer greater potential than current alternatives to bridge this theory-practice gap.

An integrated program of university and school-based work requires enthusiastic partnership with schools. They represent the settings where children in fact are taught, and where teaching and learning decisions have to be made.

To effect a functional integration of theory and practice, teachers' and university advisers' roles need to be complementary rather than mirror images one of the other. Internship clearly acknowledges the role each has to play. Teachers' expertise is essentially classroom based and this should delineate their contribution as partners in initial teacher education. Advisers must be thoroughly informed of classroom practices and contextual aspects of pupils' learning but they are **NOT** classroom teachers. Their expertise is best applied in support of the teachers. Internship success derives in important ways from advisers' skill in supporting interns' reflection on contemporary practice. It derives equally from the competence of teachers' classroom practice.

Integration must be planned for and made explicit as a prime objective for students. Following their first year's internship, students identify action research topics for further study which emerge as important issues for them. Education for girls, mainstreaming of pupils with intellectual and physical disability, aboriginal pupils, gifted and talented, profiling/assessment/reporting, collaborative teaching, work organisation and programming represent the core of concerns students identify from their first year internship. Contracts are negotiated by second year students for their detailed study and related testing of ideas during practicum, and sharing of their outcomes through written reports for other students. Third year internship requires sustained in-school testing of resultant ideas and strategies.

Flexibility is a key feature of internship organisation. Year level competencies and understandings are set jointly by teachers and advisers for all interns. Specific teacher expertise, intern concerns and maturity all interact to require flexible orchestration by advisers and their teacher teams. Just as effective teachers adapt the content that is being taught to suit their pupils, effective advisers implement internship experiences for their

students as the above factors require. This flexibility is an essential feature of the internship. It empowers interns, their teachers and advisers, and provides a real sense of program ownership by them as a planned consequence of this.

Appraisal

With teacher supply currently exceeding demand in many Australian school regions, competition for 'quality' graduates places particular importance on valid and reliable appraisal mechanisms. Clarity of purpose and explicit criteria for making judgements are two of the characteristics of successful appraisal. These are fundamental to assessment and reporting of interns' school experiences. Both formative and summative appraisals are employed. The former are associated exclusively with internship experiences, and the latter with the practicum block which culminates those experiences.

McIntyre reminds us that learning to teach is quite complex, that it is powerfully influenced by student teachers' previously acquired beliefs about teaching and images of teaching, and that these preconceived images and beliefs are resistant to attempts to change them. (McIntyre, 1992, pp. 3-4).

Internship offers students the opportunity to examine, test and modify these images and beliefs through practice over extended periods. Summative assessments are not made of their performance during this process. Internship experiences are neither formally assessed nor reported upon by teachers and advisers. Specific practices of effective teaching cannot be isolated from their context to offer valid and reliable appraisal in normative terms. It is argued that normative assessments inhibit rather than encourage students' development if applied during internship. Stenhouse has remained adamant that what students and teachers should be practising in classrooms are educational ideas from any source formulated in hypotheses testable in practice. (Stenhouse, 1975, p. 142). McIntyre requires 'proposed good practices' not only to be practised, but also to be critically tested by interns. (McIntyre, 1992, p. 5). A context free of formal assessment by supervision is fundamental to the risk taking inherent in this.

A very considerable knowledge and skill base is required of teachers if they are to competently discharge their responsibilities. Knowledge of the law and regulations applying to teachers and schools is required, and mastery of subject content and its relevant technology. Skills in instructional design, programming, communication, management, assessment and reporting and self-appraisal are among those expected of competent beginning teachers. (Scriven, 1989). Preservice students need time in classrooms to acquire and develop these complex skills and understandings before they are assessed for mastery. A necessary precondition is informed knowledge of one's pupils gained first hand. Also opportunity is required over time to develop mastery of the requisite techniques based on this knowledge. Year long internship experiences with a host class provides this opportunity. Weekly internship tasks are supported with analytic feedback by supervising teachers and advisers with the aid of video, written observations, discussion and peer review. This experience culminates with a practicum block on the internship class which is appraised through criterion-referenced, graded assessment.

Market forces for outstanding graduates, and interns' insistence that achievement be acknowledged have resulted in the adoption of overall practicum grades of Outstanding, Highly Commendable, Commendable and Satisfactory. Sustained commitment and achievement throughout the internship, and effective application of this learning during practicum attracts one of these grades arrived at collaboratively by the supervising teacher, adviser and school principal. Schools Council clearly acknowledged that 'Completion of a year's work in situ is a much better basis on which to judge the likely continued success of a (student) teacher, than a judgement of 'ready to teach' drawn from a teaching round experience.' (Schools Council, 1990, p. 98).

Student appraisal following stand-alone practicum blocks often remains cursory. It lacks credibility and possibly of greater importance, it is too often devoid of responsibility for the student teacher's actual performance. The linked internship - practicum model provides a context of 'responsible ownership' by teachers, advisers, principals and peers of interns' professional and vocational growth. Interns represent a central and important part of their placement schools' agenda: they belong, are taken seriously and regularly report on his with approval.

At the culmination of their first year internship - practicum experience, where it is apparent that interns do not have the professional aptitude and vocational competence required they are failed. They are counselled out of the course, provided with advanced standing for studies completed and assisted with access to an alternative (non-teaching) course, if required. While such decisions are not easy to take, the extensive school-based period affords the confidence on which to make them. That this is the appropriate time for such decision, and the centrality of the teaching profession in taking them, are forcefully acknowledged by all schools involved. Appraisal is a crucial part of any person's professional growth. The challenge is to make its purposes and procedures explicit, and to use it to enhance competence.

Professional Development

An important, if unintentional impact of internship has been opportunities it provides for teachers' own professional development. Mentoring of interns leads teachers to recognise their considerable expertise in teaching. They question their existing classroom practice and attempt new arrangements which foster improved practice. Demonstrating good practice rewards teachers. Reflection normally triggers a growing confidence for these mentors, while articulation of their teaching fosters a desire to enhance it further. Discussion of this with interns reflects expertise often "played down" by teachers.

Reflection on their teaching and analysis of their interns' teaching begins to access for these teachers knowledge and understandings which are embodied in this practice itself, the processes of Schon's knowing in action and reflection in action (Schon, 1983). The fundamental importance of this for teachers' professional development is commented on by McIntyre: 'Given the resources (time), serious engagement in initial teacher education can be enormously work-enhancing for teachers. Here is an innovation which not only gives enhanced status to classroom teaching expertise, but also encourages teachers themselves to recognise the depth and quality of their expertise, to articulate, share and examine that expertise, and thence to seek to develop that expertise more fully.' (McIntyre, 1992, p. 14).

Continuous explication of vocational practice, from programming and assessment to positions taken on professional issues, sharpens teachers' awareness of the complexity of their craft and develops their facility with its exposition. Teachers acknowledge consistently the marked improvement in their own practice that mentoring appears to make.

During the planning phase of internship design, teachers negotiated credentials in lieu of fee for service for their involvement as mentors. Practicum supervision payments remained award specific. Recognition and formal accreditation of teachers' workplace learning acquired through mentoring has remained from the outset a valued feature of the schools' partnership with the university. Not only is this arrangement cost neutral, it recognises professional development for course credit, securing in turn enhanced enrolment by these teachers in formal university courses.

Conclusion

Goals and values for Australian education systems and schools have been clearly stated by the Australian Education Council, and have been taken up by independent and state authorities. The Schools Council, **Charter for Teaching**, provides competencies which are essential in

the context of these goals and values. These should be construed as the basis for the curriculum of teacher training, with a primary focus on learning how to make teaching practice explicit.

The purpose of this paper has been to describe key features of the internship program at the Southern Cross University. These arrangements have been developed specifically to remove the abstruse in initial training, to effect more explicit and thereby improved teaching by its graduates. In this endeavour, as the first graduates emerge from the program, there are good reasons to believe pupils' learning has been enhanced and teacher's professional growth encouraged.

This being said, it is useful to remember that internship remains an innovation, requiring refinement and appraisal. As McIntyre cautions: "We have hardly begun to understand, far less develop, the elements of successful school-based teacher education." (McIntyre, 1992, p. 11).

More research is needed to guide this development, through which experienced teachers' expertise is fostered in their stewardship of junior colleagues. Real professionals take seriously this responsibility.

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